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LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
**EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:
CREATING GRADUATES WITH
IMPACT IN EDUCATION**

By Paula Sealey, Jacqueline Stevenson & Sue Clegg

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Acknowledgements and contributors

This booklet has arisen from a research project funded by the Higher Education Academy subject group for education, ESCalate, into 'Understanding the Value of Extra-Curricular Activities in Creating Graduates with Impact in Education'.

The project team comprised: Jacqueline Stevenson; Professor Sue Clegg and Paula Sealey from the Centre for Social and Educational Research across the Life-course (SERL) at Leeds Metropolitan University.

We would like to thank ESCalate for initially funding the research project, as well as all those employers, staff and students who participated in the research.

It all comes down to graduate attributes 'what have I done? what makes me distinct from everyone else going into the world of work?' because we have students all going for the same jobs and where we can, we try to support that
(Lecturer in HE, Secondary PE Teaching)



Summer Tools
at Life

INTRODUCTION

Graduate employability has become an area of growing concern for higher education institutions, with universities under increasing pressure to address employability in the curriculum (Maher and Graves, 2008). Guidance as to the skills and attributes desired by employers is widespread (Hogarth et al, 2007; Archer and Davison, 2008) and, since 2005-06, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has required all universities to ensure that undergraduate students are provided with an opportunity to engage in Personal Development Planning (PDP), including constructing PDP Progress files - personal records of learning and achievements, including participation in extra-curricular activities (ECA), from which material can be selected to produce personal statements, including CVs for employers.

Research indicates that, across the HE sector, some students already value many forms of ECA, engage in them and recognise their benefit for both their academic studies and future employment (Wood et al, 2011). These students are able to demonstrate via CVs and application forms that, through their participation, they have developed a wide range of transferable skills including interpersonal skills, teamwork, presentation skills, reflection, self-direction, project management and leadership and/or teaching skills.

Students who have the highest participation in the types of ECA valued by both institutions and employers tend to be those students who are middle-class, have no caring responsibilities and have little or no part-time working commitments (Clegg, Stevenson and Willott, 2009). These students are also more likely to recognise how they can 'sell' their participation to employers. Other students, however, may have fewer opportunities to participate in ECA or may not recognise the value of the ECA they may be undertaking (Stevenson and Clegg, 2011). Consequently they may be severely disadvantaged when applying for post-graduate employment.

However, whilst there is evidence that students on education courses have differential curricular experiences (Flintoff, 2008; Carrington and Skelton, 2003) and retention rates (Smithers and Robinson, 2008; Basit et al, 2007; Wilson et al, 2007; Moyles and Cavendish, 2001), little is known about these students' specific participation in ECA and how staff teaching on education courses are, or are not, supporting their students to use participation in ECA to become the 'future employed'.

This research was, therefore, designed to enhance conceptual and theoretical understandings of the diversity and value of extra-curricular activities to education students, staff and employers, and to understand how ECA might be integrated into the education curriculum, developed to enhance employability and, in so doing, to create graduates with impact.

THE RESEARCH

As part of a wider project, the team interviewed staff and students at Leeds Metropolitan University and four Further Education Colleges across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to gain an understanding of how education staff and students draw on ECA in relationship to curriculum activities and in shaping their graduate futures.

Eleven interactive focus groups were conducted, comprising a total of 52 students. The focus groups allowed us to explore the forms of ECA that students were participating in; the rationale for participation; how they were thinking about their futures; and how they were, or were not, using participation in ECA to become the 'future employed'. We also conducted twenty interviews with individual students. These interviews allowed us to investigate in greater depth how students perceive the value of ECA, how they may be using participation in ECA to distinguish themselves from other graduates, and the other forms of employability strategies which appeared, from the students' perspectives, to be making the most impact. The students who participated in the research were enrolled on a range of education courses including Access to HE courses, Foundation degrees, BA honours degrees, including those leading to qualified teacher status (QTS) as well as students studying for a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and Masters degrees.

Twelve members of staff were also interviewed, enabling us to explore the overall aims of each course, the support given for participation in ECA, the value given to different forms of ECA, the ways in which ECA are, or are not, integrated into the curriculum, including within specific employability initiatives and the possible impact of participation on retention, achievement and the student satisfaction of education students.

Finally, in order to explore how employers regard different forms of ECA and how these can contribute to employability, twenty-one telephone interviews were conducted with head teachers or other key recruiting staff in teaching and/or other education-related areas.

In previous research definitions of ECA are largely absent (Clegg, Stevenson and Willott, 2009). However, we were interested in exploring the full range of ECA that students on education courses were participating in and whether such participation was recognised and/or encouraged by staff and employers. Therefore, for this research we asked participants to consider: paid work either at or outside their academic institution; art, drama and music; faith and cultural activities; family, domestic or caring responsibilities; sport and/or other physical activities; political activities and volunteering.

Over the next few pages we summarise employer, staff and students' responses and present vignettes relating to six different students who participated in this research.

Further information on the project and the final project report can be found at <http://escalate.ac.uk/downloads/8664.pdf>.

We are looking to recruit the 'whole person' – someone who has a wide range of interests and is willing to contribute to the wider school community. I recently received a CV from a graduate who listed, for ECA, shopping, socialising and going to the cinema. I wasn't interested
(Head of Department)





SUMMARY OF RESEARCH WITH EMPLOYERS

'I'm not interested when applicants talk about walking their dog!'

Most forms of ECA are highly valued by those employers interviewed and they expect to see evidence of participation on a CV or job application form. After academic qualifications and work experience, evidence of participation in ECA is the factor that employers pay most attention to.

Employers believe that their institutions (schools, nurseries, colleges) benefit greatly from graduates who demonstrate commitment, enthusiasm and are 'well-rounded individuals' through their participation in ECA. They are particularly interested in activities where the applicant has demonstrated an involvement in voluntary work, team-working or a leadership role. Such participation is considered key to evidencing core interpersonal skills as well as 'soft' characteristics, for example confidence, resilience and tenacity, which are deemed essential to those working in education. Specific skill sets that are more aligned to the working environment are also valued, in particular, time management, organisational skills, formal communication skills and management skills.

ECA which evidence the development of citizenship, social, moral and ethical responsibilities are also highly regarded. However, political activity is not, and, indeed reference to this form of ECA can be detrimental to prospective candidates seeking employment. In addition, evidence of ECA is only of interest to employers if applicants can translate their acquired skills e.g. coaching football or teaching dance, to the institution they are applying to. Employers are also critical of graduates who do not sufficiently align their ECA to the specific job role/application and/or organisation, or do not evidence how such activities support their suitability for the role. Many applicants also offer generic application forms/CVs and fail to utilise the potential of their ECA to their fullest capacity.

Given the high importance attached to skills gained through ECA there is concern that some students, despite participating in ECA, are not capitalizing on the opportunities that such participation affords to them.

'When looking at application letters I look to see what the applicant did on their teaching practice. I'm looking for that little extra that could provide additionality for the school. But I am tired of receiving blanket applications that all look the same. I understand why applicants do it but I cannot excuse it. They never say why/how they could meet our school's needs and how they could take things forward'

(Headmaster)

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH WITH STAFF

'They're kept informed of ECA but it's very much up to them whether they get involved in it. It's not written into the course so to speak.'

Staff attitudes towards ECA are very dependent upon the type of educational course they are teaching. Those teaching students on part-time evening/weekend courses, who are also in full-time employment, consider that their students do not have the time available to participate in ECA. They also question whether it would be beneficial to their career progression to do so. In contrast, those teaching full-time undergraduates perceive a greater value to their students' participation ECA and believe that it can greatly enhance employability when seeking employment in such a competitive industry. These staff also believe that participation in ECA can lead to graduates having more impact within their chosen fields.

However, many staff are unaware of whether their students are involved in ECA or not. This means that they may make assumptions that their students are, or are not. Since these assumptions may not be accurate this may lead to a confused picture of who is or who is not participating in ECA which, in turn, makes it problematic to incorporate effective discussions of ECA into the curricula. Consequently discussion of ECA is completely absent from some courses.

Other staff are, however, actively trying to support their students to become the future employed and are encouraging them to draw attention to ECA on application forms and CVs. However, although these staff perceive ECA to be worthwhile, there is no consensus as to how ECA might be integrated into the education curriculum. Consequently, as evidenced by the employers, not all students are drawing appropriate attention to their ECA.



Quite often I've said to the first and second years 'your degree is one aspect, you're all going to go out of here with a degree, but so are students from other universities so ECA is very important'. But I'm not always sure as to how much importance they put on it. Maybe it's something that we on the course have to look at in greater detail.
(Lecturer in HE, Secondary PE Teaching)



SUMMARY OF RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS

'I want to do some volunteering, in Kenya maybe, in a school. I think that will really give me the edge on my CV'

Students held a variety of definitions of ECA: some had a very narrow focus, such as gaining coaching qualifications or volunteering in a school, related specifically to the curriculum and to their desired post-graduate employment. Others gave more broad-based definitions and included what others might consider to be 'hobbies' such as reading or socialising. Some students, especially mature ones, struggled with the term ECA itself, and preferred terms such as 'life experiences' or 'life skills' as they felt this encompassed all the activities that they did in life be it sports, voluntary work, caring for others, political or faith related activities. Many of the students also felt that there was a distinction between a hobby and ECA, as one student commented: 'if it's not linked to school then it's not an ECA ... so I consider language skills a hobby'.

Participation in ECA was also extremely variable. Many of the younger students had stopped the ECA that they had been participating in before coming to university, as they were unable to combine their academic studies with part-time employment or participation in other forms of ECA. Others complained that the cost, particularly of participating in university sporting activities, was prohibitive.

Other students were participating in a range of ECA but did not recognise it as so; this was particularly so for those with caring responsibilities or those undertaking low-skilled, part-time work. Consequently these students were not drawing attention to these experiences on their application forms or CVs.

The largest group of students, however, recognised the importance of participation in ECA and were actively building experiences which they could utilise when applying for jobs. They understood the value that employers placed on ECA and were aware that this might make them distinct in the labour market. However, many fell into the trap of using a 'scatter-gun' approach when listing on CVs the ECA they had participated in, evidencing all that they had done rather than closely linking it to the job they were applying for. Others listed relevant ECA but did not evidence the skills that they had acquired through such participation or highlight the potential benefit this could bring to the employing institution.

'If I did do a volunteering period or something I'd like to be able to sell myself on things like that, like more unorthodox things, things like I've been a course rep and I've been places, I've done things, so I want to portray myself as a good role model, that's how I want to be'

(2nd Year Student, Secondary PE Teaching)

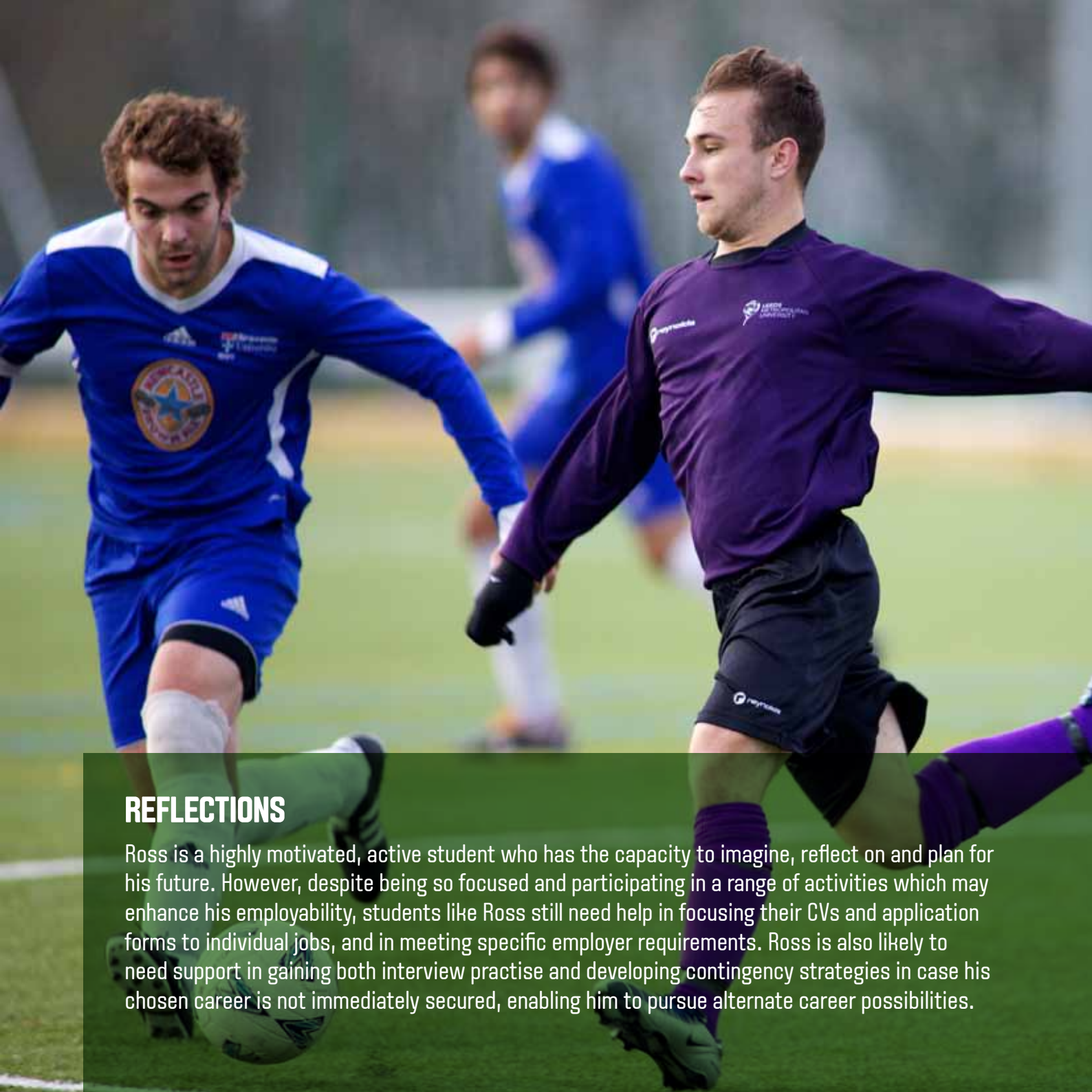
ROSS

Ross is 20 and is the first member of his family to go to university. He has planned to be a PE teacher for many years and is now in his last year of a Secondary PE Teaching degree. He is already planning for his long-term future, intending to become a senior member of a sports department within a school, and working for forty or fifty years until he retires.

At school Ross participated in various sports-related activities on most evenings and tailored his personal statement to incorporate all his ECA when applying to university. Since commencing his degree, however, his ECA participation has dropped off significantly since, as he explains 'I made a pledge to myself and my parents that I would do everything I could to get a 'good degree' ... so I sort of basically put my education over my sport'. He is adamant, however, that he will recommence his sporting activities once he has graduated. Ross is also concerned that an injury would affect his course, causing him to have to take time off, or preventing him, for example, from being able to type. He also believes that participation in ECA can have a 'negative impact'. He has witnessed others on his course missing deadlines or working in the library throughout the night to complete assignments because they have spent too much time on the sports field. He feels that some of his peers do not strike the right balance between sport and academic work and he does not believe it is possible to do both successfully without it causing significant stress.

Although Ross is not currently playing sport he is highly aware of the value of ECA on his CV and is deliberately participating in other activities with a view towards his employability, such as gaining coaching awards. He has also undertaken a significant amount of volunteering, coaching at his local cricket club and organising sports days and running summer clubs in primary schools. He is keenly aware of the social skills he is acquiring through such activities, such as developing conversational skills, gaining organisational skills, 'creating a disciplined lifestyle' and becoming 'more confident in certain social situations'.

Ross is convinced that participation in ECA can be the deciding factor between obtaining a job or not when other applicants hold the same qualification or degree classification and, consequently, is trying to undertake as many additional courses as he can. He believes that 'if you don't show willingness to do extra-curricular it shows a lack of enthusiasm' and that ultimately ECA will make people 'more employable' and they will be in 'better employment'.



REFLECTIONS

Ross is a highly motivated, active student who has the capacity to imagine, reflect on and plan for his future. However, despite being so focused and participating in a range of activities which may enhance his employability, students like Ross still need help in focusing their CVs and application forms to individual jobs, and in meeting specific employer requirements. Ross is also likely to need support in gaining both interview practise and developing contingency strategies in case his chosen career is not immediately secured, enabling him to pursue alternate career possibilities.



REFLECTIONS

Students like Kenny need support and guidance to consider ECA in its broadest context, in order to develop a better awareness of the types of ECA that could be included on a CV. Although Kenny is aware of the transferable skills he has acquired through his participation in ECA he needs further support to identify how he can include evidence from such participation to demonstrate these skills. He then needs further support from his tutors to help him 'sell himself', for example participation in structured opportunities to reflect on his experiences. This could include, for example, providing students with the opportunity to 'interview' each other as part of PDP activities. Kenny may also find it useful to examine what other students have put on CVs and application forms.

KENNY

Kenny is 27 and on a one year Access to Higher Education course at his local FE College. He gained a degree in music when he left school and then worked as a self-employed musician for five years. He subsequently decided he wanted to change career and now plans to study Archaeology and Classics at a nearby university. The admissions department at the university advised him to study an Access to Higher Education course in order to fulfil their entry requirements. If he achieves his goal, post-graduation Kenny is hoping to find employment as a tour guide in a museum where he can undertake community education work teaching children about archaeology and history.

Kenny has a very narrow definition of what constitutes ECA. For him it relates only to activities that take place within the academic institution he is studying at but that are 'outside' of the normal curriculum. He commented that 'if it's unrelated to the institution I probably wouldn't think of it in that fashion'. Consequently, when playing rugby for his school team Kenny was participating in extra-curricular activity but when playing for a local community team he was not; when playing in his university samba band it was ECA, but when playing in bands outside of the university it was not. Kenny also does not acknowledge activities such as volunteering or paid work as ECA since not only are they not related to the institution but 'they'd just be things that happen anyway'.

Kenny is aware, however, that his participation in ECA, including his music activities, has taught him such transferable skills as 'teamwork, organisational skills and time-management and these kinds of things' which will help to make him employable. However, despite being heavily involved within the music industry, organising a national music festival and promoting both music and bands, Kenny did not view this as being important when applying for his Archaeology course as the course was not music related. However, when asked whether he might have made more of his participation in ECA Kenny did comment that 'I don't think I sell myself terribly well. I don't think I did much of 'I have learned this from this' or anything'.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte is 22 and currently on the third year of the four year BA Hons Primary Education course which will enable her to qualify as a primary school teacher. As her course has a vocational outcome it is expected by her tutors that she will qualify and go into teaching.

Over the course of the year, however, Charlotte has begun to realise that she no longer wishes to become a primary school teacher and is now very uncertain about her future career. Unlike many students who may quickly recognise that they have made a career or course mistake, it has taken Charlotte two years, including attendance on work placement, to decide that primary school teaching is not what she wants to do as a career. However, she does not know what career she would like to undertake instead. She comments that: 'I don't really know what I want to do, it's all kind of a big blur but I don't know what's available ... I feel like I'm flailing and floundering a little bit because I don't know what to do'.

Charlotte would like to explore alternative career options, still linked to education but not necessarily teaching in a primary school. However, she is unaware of the options available, remarking that her course tutors 'have not really sat and spoken to us about 'with your qualification you can also do this'." Even though she needs help Charlotte is reluctant to seek it from her tutors since 'you don't want the embarrassment of going to them and saying 'actually, by the way, love your course, it's great, but I'm thinking about changing careers now, what do you suggest?'". Charlotte knows that in her fourth year she will get support with job applications and interview techniques but feels that during Year 3 she should be given careers advice and guidance before it could be considered 'too late' to change her plans.

Being so uncertain of her future career means that Charlotte is no longer sure what forms of ECA are appropriate for her to engage in. Before attending university she participated in a wide variety of ECA but this has decreased significantly due to financial constraints and the time commitments associated with her course. However, she knows that ECA is an important addition to a CV and that a lack of it would be conspicuous. Having danced for many years, Charlotte stopped when starting university due to the expense but is now worried that when she attends for an interview people will say: 'Why haven't you done it for the last four years then?'



REFLECTIONS

Charlotte's experiences highlight that even students on highly vocational courses may have a 'change of heart' mid-way through their course or may be much less certain about their future careers than other students. Such students need to be advised of alternative career routes and provided with careers guidance and support throughout their whole course. This will also support them to tailor their participation in ECA to a variety of career options. Inviting people external to the course to give lectures about alternative future work possibilities would be highly beneficial to students like Charlotte, whilst other students who may feel they have clear career pathways may benefit from such activities at some point in the future.



REFLECTIONS

Khadija's story evidences the ways in which structural and financial limitations can inhibit the participation in ECA of students with caring responsibilities which may, in turn, negatively inform their possibilities as the 'future employed'. It is also clear, however, that Khadija is only thinking about a narrow range of skills and experiences which she believes create a positive CV. She does not recognise that her ability to speak three languages and her resilience and tenacity may have value to UK employers. For students like Khadija, therefore, it is essential that she is advised about the broader skills and qualities that employers are seeking so that she can evidence appropriate activities and create a positive narrative.

KHADIJA

Khadija is a 25 year old African student. She arrived in the UK nine years ago having completed her high school education and has refugee status. On arrival in England she undertook a range of childcare courses before applying to university and is just about to graduate from a BA Hons Childhood Studies course. Khadija has always wanted to gain a university degree and although she had to change career direction, having failed to get on to a nursing course, she still feels lucky to have been accepted at the university.

Whilst studying for her degree, Khadija became pregnant and now lives with her young son, Mohamed, within walking distance of her university. At the start of her degree, Khadija participated in a range of ECA including volunteering at a playgroup and undertaking fitness classes. However, following the birth of her son these had to stop. She has found her final year very stressful, and whilst she readily acknowledges the support she has received from her tutors, who have tried to accommodate her needs, Khadija believes that she has lacked advice and guidance about the future. She is very unsure as to her future career apart from knowing that she wishes to work with children. She comments that 'at first I wanted to do a Masters in Social Work but then sometimes I think I want to be a teacher ... I'm quite confused.'

Khadija is now being encouraged by one of her tutors to think about becoming a teacher. However she is hesitant about embarking upon the post-graduate training which she would need to complete, because of the combined pressure of the intensive workload and being a single parent. She is also concerned that she does not have a very strong CV since she has not been able to undertake the same amount of ECA that her student peers have done. Whilst her tutors encourage all the students to get involved with voluntary work, especially those wishing to go into teaching, this has been impossible for Khadija because of her childcare commitments.

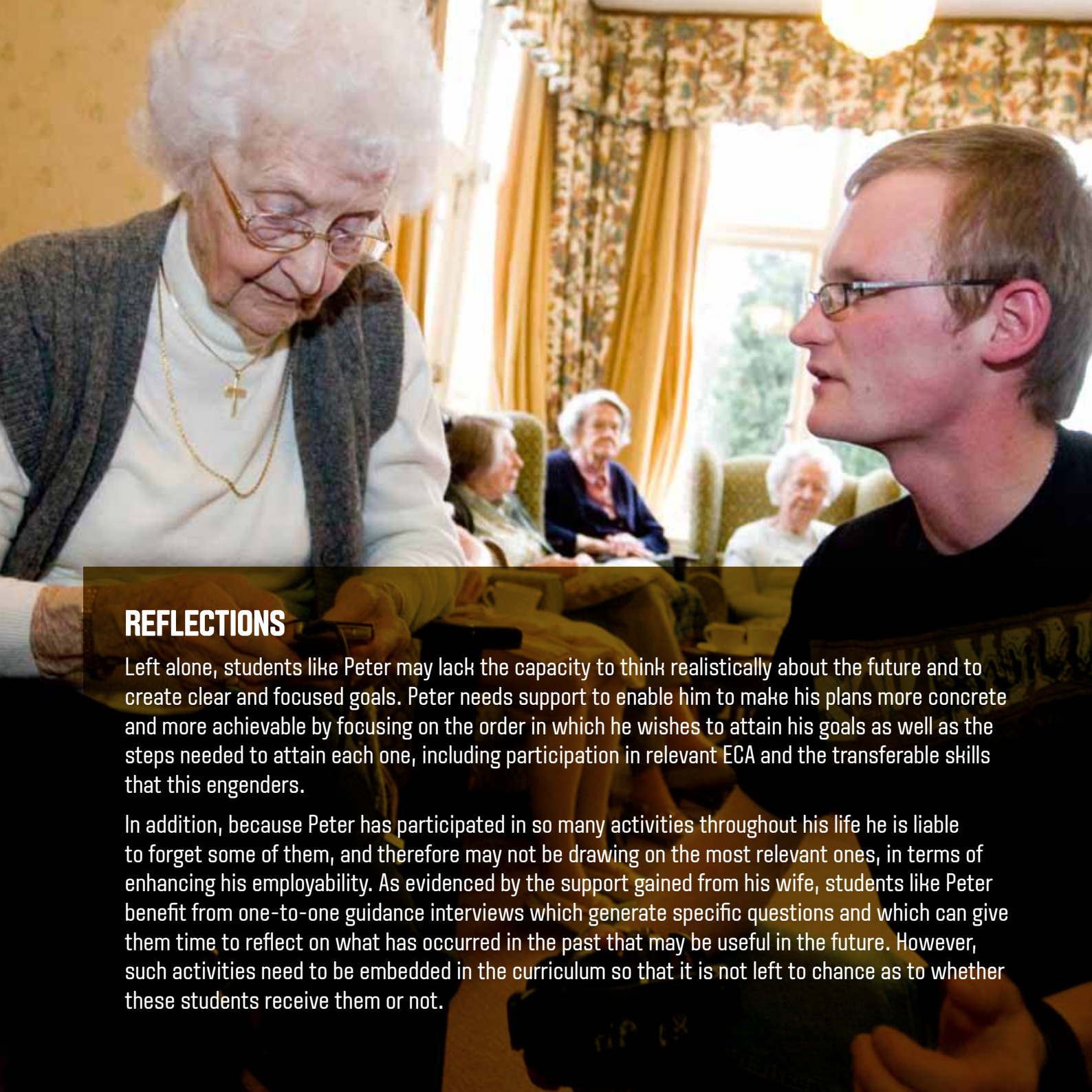
Khadija has now reached a point where she feels unable to commit to any definite long term career plans. She is considering taking a year out post-graduation to reassess her options, decide what she really enjoys doing and build a better CV. She hopes to qualify as a childminder, not only for financial reasons but also to enable her to use this practical experience on her CV and application forms.

PETER

Peter grew up in Northern Ireland and, after studying for his A levels, he embarked on a two year BTEC in Music Technology. He moved to England in order to complete a degree in Creative Music and Sound Technology. This was followed by work as a sound engineer, a year doing voluntary work for his local church and two years' work as a teaching assistant at a local primary school. Now aged 26 and married, Peter is studying on the one year PGCE Primary Education course.

Peter has participated in a wide range of ECA including attending Scouts whilst a child, running an animation club and a football club whilst on work placement, a lengthy spell of voluntary work in Belfast at a multi-cultural resource centre and at a local city centre Christian charity, learning Turkish and Spanish, playing the djembe drum and learning tae kwon do. He is passionate about ECA and keen to participate in a range of activities, though he recognises that he frequently moves from one activity to another and participates in numerous activities at the same time before embarking on something new.

Peter also has multiple long-term goals: 'to learn sign language, to be accredited as a hearing impairment skills teacher, to work within a school, or possibly a special educational needs learning centre ... to become a head teacher ... to work in Turkey in a primary school'. However whilst each of these goals is of value, cumulatively they mean that he lacks a clear focus. Peter has undertaken some reflective activities during his course which have helped him consider the link between participation in ECA to his career plans. However, he believes that he has gained most focus from talking to his wife who 'asks me very specific questions' which help him to reflect since 'it takes a conversation to remember 'oh yes I did the multi-cultural resource centre' because sometimes I just forget about it'. Through such conversations he has started to recognise how the skills he has learned through his academic studies, voluntary work and ECA are transferable, and has come to more easily understand how he can draw on his past experiences to help him to become the future employed.



REFLECTIONS

Left alone, students like Peter may lack the capacity to think realistically about the future and to create clear and focused goals. Peter needs support to enable him to make his plans more concrete and more achievable by focusing on the order in which he wishes to attain his goals as well as the steps needed to attain each one, including participation in relevant ECA and the transferable skills that this engenders.

In addition, because Peter has participated in so many activities throughout his life he is liable to forget some of them, and therefore may not be drawing on the most relevant ones, in terms of enhancing his employability. As evidenced by the support gained from his wife, students like Peter benefit from one-to-one guidance interviews which generate specific questions and which can give them time to reflect on what has occurred in the past that may be useful in the future. However, such activities need to be embedded in the curriculum so that it is not left to chance as to whether these students receive them or not.



REFLECTIONS

Although Ailsa is currently only studying on a one year intensive course it is part of a longer term career trajectory. Therefore, it is important that her current tutors recognise that she has long-term plans. In addition, although her tutors believe that participation in ECA may not be realistic at the present time any ECA that has occurred in the past should be identified and she should be afforded support to utilise this when making applications. However, her tutors are making the assumption that she is not currently participating in ECA which is not the case and Ailsa needs support to recognise the value of this participation.

AILSA

Ailsa attends an Access to Higher Education course at a city centre FE college in Scotland. The course consists of 3 days a week in college for one year and is designed for mature students wishing to re-enter education. The course belongs to a Wider Access Programme which guarantees that if Ailsa passes the course she will be found a place at one of the universities participating in the programme. Ailsa is using this course as a way of gaining a place on a teacher training degree at the nearby university. Ailsa is the mother of three children, and as well as attending college she works for the NHS, often coming to college straight from finishing a night shift at work.

As soon as she started the Access course Ailsa had to complete her UCAS application form for her desired university and course. She found this really difficult and believes that she would have benefited from greater guidance and support. In particular she believes her tutors could have done more to raise awareness of the skills and experiences she may have developed, including through participation in ECA, which may make her 'stand out'. However, Ailsa's tutors believe that because the course is for only one year, and because many of the students are working, have children living at home, and are on low incomes, it is unrealistic to suggest that they undertake any form of ECA that might help with their UCAS application or their future employability.

In contrast, however, Ailsa is very aware of the importance of such activities, commenting that 'whoever wants to do a B.Ed, a lot of them are going to have to get placements maybe to do with care or things like that to get experience ... they need to do community work or things like that ... when you're applying you can say 'in relation to this course I have done this, this and this or whatever'. It kind of puts you up in the rankings a wee bit'.

Ailsa places particular emphasis on her previous work experience. She believes that whilst universities may primarily consider qualifications when recruiting school leavers, when recruiting mature students 'they value life experiences'. She is also aware that employers value prior work experience. However, whilst Ailsa participates in various ECA such as running children's classes at church, helping out at a local school and running Brownies, she does not view such activities as having any impact upon her future employability. For her, such activities are just 'part of you ... what you do'.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Gaining employment in education or education-related jobs has become highly competitive and it is through participation in ECA that students may be able to enhance their employability. However, as evidenced by this research, not all students are either participating in ECA, recognise the value of their participation, or tailor their participation when applying for jobs.

In addition, many of the students we interviewed had been given little, or no, opportunity to reflect on their personal journeys and taking part in the research interview or focus group was their first opportunity to do so. These students found the opportunity to reflect on their participation in ECA, and how they could draw on this to become the 'future employed', extremely helpful. Peter, for example, having been asked specific questions about his life and previous work experiences during the interview, commented that the interview had 'definitely redefined my thinking of what ECA as a phrase is and so it's not just an after school club or something that's linked with school but actually it's part of your learning as a person ... it makes an impact on me, makes an impact on everything I do, my employability and it's all related'; whilst Megan, also a PGCE Primary Education student, claimed that 'the interview definitely made me consider my definition of ECA. I realised that activities such as my part-time job are considered as extra-curricular, whereas before I only considered hobbies'. She also added that by attending a focus group she had come to realise that 'over this stressful year it is important to stay well-rounded in my activities and interests. I also had not realised how important ECA are to prospective employers'. As a consequence of her participation in the research interview Megan immediately recommenced two of the ECA that she had previously participated in - ballet lessons and playing the piano.

Many students are, of course, supported by their academic tutors to recognise and evidence the ECA that they are participating in. However, as highlighted by our research with employers, some students are still not linking their ECA, and the skills and experiences derived from their participation, closely enough to the job they are applying for. These students are likely to be disadvantaged in the job market. It is, therefore, important that all students are supported to recognise how employers view different forms of ECA and how these may be evidenced in such a way as to meet the requirements of employers and the specifics of the job role. These types of activities need to be embedded in the curriculum to enable them to meet the individual needs of all students regardless of their backgrounds and personal circumstances.



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CONTACT DETAILS

For further information on the project contact:

Jacqueline Stevenson

Centre for Social and Educational Research across the Life-course (SERL)

Leeds Metropolitan University

Fairfax 204

Headingley Campus

Leeds LS6 3QS

Email: j.stevenson@leedsmet.ac.uk

